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Feb. 18, 2011

CARDIN, DURBIN, SNOWE, OTHERS INTRODUCE BILL TO ELIMINATE THE PRACTICE OF CHILD MARRIAGES OVERSEAS

WASHINGTON –**U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin** joined Assistant Senate Majority Leader Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Senator Olympia Snowe (R-ME) in introducing legislation yesterday which seeks to end the harmful practice of child marriage overseas. The *International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act* would require the U.S. Government to develop an integrated, strategic approach to reduce, and ultimately end, the practice of child marriage. The bill is also cosponsored by Senators Boxer (D-CA), Cardin (D-MD) Brown (R-MA) and Feinstein (D-CA).

“America has been and continues to be a leader in upholding human rights. We cannot, in good conscience allow young girls to be forced into situations that often lead to abuse, isolation and endangerment,” said **Senator Cardin**. “Child marriages have a ripple effect on the communities and the countries where they take place, by removing young women from the economic and educational opportunities that foster growth and sustainable development for entire populations. We must stand together to help end this corrosive practice”

“Tens of millions of women and girls around the world have lost their dignity, independence and lives due to child marriage,” **Senator Durbin** said. “Child marriage denies these women and girls of an education, economic independence and is the root cause of many of the world’s most pressing development issues - HIV/AIDS, child mortality, and abject poverty. This bill makes it the policy of the U.S. government to end child marriage around the globe. It is a powerful statement of our priorities as a nation and something that will change the lives of millions in some of the world’s forgotten places.”

“The harmful practice of forced child marriage – which is often at the root of and exacerbates many of the problems the international community is working to prevent - has deprived vulnerable girls in developing countries of their human rights; denied girls of certain education and employment opportunities; significantly expanded the risk of maternal and infant death; and increased the spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and AIDS,” said **Senator Snowe**. “I am grateful for the Senate’s support of these vital programs to prevent the incidence of child marriage last Congress and look forward to working with my colleagues in both the House and Senate to enact this legislation into law to maximize U.S. investment in these foreign assistance programs and protect the estimated 100 million girls in developing countries who are at risk of being married as children over the next decade.”

Senator Boxer said, “I am so pleased to join with Senators Durbin and Snowe on legislation that seeks to end the harmful practice of child marriage in developing countries, which dramatically increases the risk of death in childbirth, infant mortality, and sexually transmitted diseases. Helping to prevent the marriage of very young girls will give them a better chance at completing their education and fulfilling their dreams.”

“The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act is a strong component of the fight against human trafficking, a despicable crime that occurs both at home and abroad and which perpetuates bonded labor, enslavement, and commercial exploitation,” said **Senator Brown**. “I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of the reintroduction of this bill, and it is my hope that both the House and the Senate will pass this important piece of legislation in a bipartisan effort.”

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 60 million girls in developing countries now ages 20 to 24 were married under the age of 18. The Population Council estimates that the number will increase by 100 million over the next decade if current trends continue.

Child marriage is often carried out through force or coercion. It deprives young girls – and sometimes boys - of their dignity and human rights. In some countries, it is not uncommon for girls as young as seven or eight years old to be married. These young victims are robbed of their childhoods.

In addition to denying tens of millions of women and girls their dignity, child marriage also endangers their health. Marriage at an early age puts girls at greater risk of dying as a result of childbirth. Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death for women 15 to 19 years old in developing countries. Their children also face higher mortality rates.

The *International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act* would:

- Express the Sense of the Congress that child marriage in developing countries undermines U.S. investments in foreign assistance;
- Requires the President to submit a report to Congress within 180 days describing a comprehensive strategy to reduce child marriage overseas.
- Authorize the President to spend such sums as necessary to provide assistance to reduce child marriage. This new effort would complement and enhance existing programs designed to improve girls’ access to education and health care, raise community social awareness about child marriage, increase women’s economic opportunities, and prevent gender-based violence.
- Require the U.S. State Department to collect data on the prevalence of child marriage and its impact on meeting development goals, and describe the prevalence of child marriage in its annual Human Rights Report.

A similar bill was unanimously approved by the Senate last year however a small group of House members blocked the bill’s ultimate passage.